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Dressing the dead body

My current research focuses on textiles and rites, especially woven textiles for funerals and moments of loss. What active role can a textile such as an infant-wrapping cloth or a funeral pall play in the mourning process? This article will describe the development and current questions that address 1) the infant-wrapping cloth – the textile that is used to dress, clothe, or cover the dead body with particular attention to the question of infant mortality and the material practices of care. 2) The funeral pall that is used at funerals, draped over the coffin or as a body cover at hospital viewing rooms. One example to be presented is *Kortedalagrönika* ('The Chronicle of Kortedala'), a collaborative project, woven for a church in Gothenburg. My work is based in artistic practice but opens up several scientific and existential questions.

HAND WEAVING – ROW BY ROW, INCH BY INCH – has been practised for thousands of years – and is a practice that is carried out not only out of necessity, but also when a creative longing and urge strikes practitioners of the art. Even though the process of connecting warp and weft is a repetitive one, and can sometimes be rather monotonous, the tedium can be compensated for by the infinite variations that come into being in the constructions of weaving patterns, as well as in the abundance of available colours and materials. Moreover, what hand weavers invest in time and patience is also rewarded in the end by the fulsome length of the fabric – or, in my case, the blanket – which has been woven.

Pausing here to reflect for a moment, I would like to say that I often think of the blanket as a human companion and a life support. I do not think of it as a symbol – but as the textile object it actually is.

In everyday life it may be looked upon as the integral ingredient of a picnic, or maybe find its place on the back seat of a car, or on a settee. However, as I have discovered in my role as a textile artist and artistic researcher, a blanket can also be experienced as playing a far more important role. In the research project I wish to describe in this article, my artwork, in the form of blankets of different kinds, has been seen to act in a number of different ways, particularly in situations where life encounters death.

For more than 20 years I have been weaving funeral palls, which has been an experience that has led me to new understandings of grieving processes – and, in my artistic practice specifically, these new discoveries have been made possible through the use of textiles. Then an opportunity arose to investigate this specific relationship further, one where I was able to do so within the framework of an artistic research project in and through weaving.

Within this context I continued to try and find new ways of constructing bindings for the weave, as well as to seek out the meeting point between the human and the cloth – in relation to death. More specifically for this research project, I also began to explore what occurred in the encounter between humans and what I call infant-wrapping cloths. Essential questions that emerged whilst launching this research project were, for example, whether through the making of wrapping cloths for tiny infants who are stillborn questions related to grief, touch, and the wrapping of bodies could be posed. Can a small blanket be a language, a representation of touch? Can a small blanket say something when words fail those who have suffered the loss of an infant?

In this article I will describe, from a maker's perspective, both the infant-wrapping cloths and the



Fig. 1. Detail of an infant-wrapping cloth, handwoven, material silk and wool, 2011.

funeral palls that originally inspired me to create these smaller blankets. Reflecting on the textile gestures and actions that arise when these different kinds of blankets are created and used is also an integral

part of the writing that takes place in the research I am conducting.

I would like to begin where the first thoughts that emerged during the course of the process originally arose.

Funeral textiles

Only a very short sentence is needed in order to answer the question of what a funeral pall is: a funeral pall is a textile, the function of which is to be used as a blanket draped over a coffin at a funeral ceremony. However, in order to reflect on what we do with funeral palls and what they may symbolise, we need to view these two aspects over time, as well as describe how the rituals which these textiles have been a part of have changed.

The funeral pall as a part of Swedish funeral rituals has medieval roots; however, its function and use, as well as what it is an expression of in contemporary times, are really quite different from what they were in the past. We have very few of these textile objects, if any, remaining today. However, there are a number of descriptions painted on the walls of churches that can still be found (Fig. 2). What we see



Fig. 2. Medieval church painting by Albertus Pictor in Kumla Church. digitaltmuseum.se, identification number: DIGo25489.

in these paintings from former times are processions of people carrying their deceased in a coffin covered with a blanket; these paintings are often from times when the last journey was a very important part of a burial ceremony, and when it would often take days; the coffin was also often carried by hand as a tribute to the person who had died. During the course of this process, the funeral pall was a symbolic object used for its beauty and ritual value. At the churchyard, the blanket, which might belong to local families or other parishes, would be taken off before the burial took place, to then be stored away, in order to be used again and again (Hagberg 1937: 338–62).

Funeral ceremonies have changed in many ways during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. One example of the changes that have taken place is the fact that processions, that is, carrying the coffin from the home of the deceased to the place of the burial, are no longer a part of the funeral service, as used to be the case in rural Sweden. We usually see the coffin for the first time at the place where the funeral is to take place – whether this is in a church or at another location. We then take part in the funeral ritual, and

at the end leave the location, and say farewell to the deceased in the coffin. Transporting the dead – that is, carrying the dead to his or her place of rest – whether this is in a cemetery or in a crematorium – is no longer viewed from a personal or holistic perspective, but is something the undertakers carry out, often in a very discreet and unnoticeable way. Funeral palls were, for a long time, a forgotten tradition, a thing of the past, no longer needed. The availability of flowers has also played a part in replacing funeral palls as a way to pay homage to the deceased. However, when the tradition of funeral textiles was brought back into practice, its use and function were different to what they had been in the past. Now, palls make it easier to choose a very plain coffin, since they become a way to avoid very costly burials, and that is one of the reasons why funeral palls have come to exist as an alternative today. They are owned by parishes and/or belong to graveyard chapels. Mourners are allowed to borrow them free of charge.

May I continue here by mentioning that the issue of avoiding costly coffins and large funeral costs has not of course been the main incentive and reason for

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Fig. 3. Dressing the coffin, 2014.

this artistic inquiry. My wish is to strive to express something else.

A funeral pall has other values. As a textile homage to a person, the funeral pall may mean choosing a personally appropriate alternative – both in the form of a visual as well as a tactile language throughout the funeral ritual. The action of covering the coffin with the pall can be an opportunity for a family member to take an active part in the preparations, where this gesture can be seen as a way of saying farewell to a dear one – in and through the making of the bed for him or her. This insight has become clearer and clearer after many years of having experienced, as well as having reflected upon, the funeral rituals in which the palls I have created have been used.

When I first started making funeral palls, I wanted to make textile sculptures, since my main interest was in the draping of the textile as some kind of abstraction of death. The first palls were made for exhibitions in museums and galleries, but after a while, when people around me began to ask whether they could use them, my focus changed – whilst also starting to gain insight into what the essence of touch comprised. Gradually I have come to realise that the importance of these textiles is not primarily what we see when we look at them, but that what is far more important is what we do with our hands, and what the textile can do for us. Anni Albers, artist, master weaver and writer, expresses this in a very wise and insightful way: ‘We touch things to assure ourselves of reality. We touch the objects of our love. We touch the things we form. Our tactile experiences are elemental’ (Albers 1966: 62).

I am also deeply grateful to a woman, who, whilst attending an exhibition at which I showed my first funeral palls, asked me whether one of the palls could be used for her funeral. She was dying and said that a blanket of this kind was comforting to think of. Her response to my art was crucial, since it pointed out a direction that I am still following.

Churches, and more recently, hospitals, have commissioned me to weave a number of funeral palls; however, I also have palls in my studio, readily available for those looking for funeral textiles in white. Within this context, I have a particular memory that has remained with me because of the very special circumstances that surrounded it. A man who had lost his wife contacted me, and one of the first things he wanted to be assured of was whether the blanket was woven by me. He wanted to talk about the process,

how long a time it had taken, as well as to discuss the hues of the white threads I had chosen. It was as though the widower experienced the crafting process in itself as a comforting process. Could it be that the thought of the slow process of weaving functioned as an anchor for his grief? When he brought the pall back after the funeral, he also brought his children with him so that they could see the loom in the studio. I think and reflect on this moment as an example of how we try to do everything possible to make the unreal a part of reality. And for this widower, the weaver and the process of weaving became a part of that.

It is, I think, also important to add here that for me the act of weaving has no ritual impact; it is purely and simply a technique and a medium through which to make my art.

Body memory

One of the palls I have created is made with clear references to a garment, where buttons form a line down the middle, like a shirt. Allow me to tell you a little of the background story to this pall.

Some years ago I was invited to a research conference (*ArtsHealth*, University of Newcastle, Australia 2008), and I decided to ‘weave’ a paper, in order to really show what a funeral pall comprised of, and I did so in and through the object, the art work, itself.

Friends around me contributed with buttons, which, in various ways, represented memories of other garments. My aunt gave me a button that had belonged to a dress from her childhood. She said, as the dying woman I had met at the museum also said: ‘It is comforting to know that there is a textile prepared, when the day comes.’

Textiles, like other objects, often function as bearers of memory. However, what makes textiles unique is, I believe, the way our body remembers wearing the garment, and in contexts where cloth meets the person who has died, the garment is represented through the shroud in its function as a ritual textile. I also believe that wrapping up for protection and shelter is one of our basic instincts. However, when we wrap or clothe a dead body, it is of course for a different purpose than to avoid it being cold. Nevertheless, I do think that there is some kind of basic recognition in the act of wrapping that helps us to handle the loss of a dear one, and the very association of a blanket as a symbol of everyday warmth and protection

may also comfort those enduring grief and loss. When having to face this stark situation, the clothing can help in that it represents respect and dignity. Furthermore, the blanket or pall over the coffin is not only a shroud, or merely about wrapping, but also has a symbolic value. It can symbolise the folding and unfolding of a piece of cloth (like a sheet) as a domestic activity that reminds us of the everyday. When we bring this gesture to the funeral ritual, the textile – in the shape of everyday life – may also come to be a tool through which we can feel a sense of presence, albeit within a context of a completely different and more difficult kind.

An infant-wrapping cloth

At the conference where I presented the ‘button blanket’, I was touched by a question from a doctor who worked in neonatal care. She said something like

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Fig. 4. The button blanket, 2008.



Fig. 5. Detail of the button blanket.

this: ‘I wish you could weave smaller blankets for me. When we lose a child, I never know what to say to the parents. With a blanket in my hand, I could say: “You may wrap your baby in this”’.

I went home from the conference with the doctor’s question inside of me, albeit unanswered at that point in time. But her question gradually became my question, that is: is there a need, within clinical care, for an infant-wrapping cloth, and if so, what should it look like? Several years later, I began to slowly but surely find a way to approach the wish I had inside of me by weaving the most beautiful, and the softest of blankets I could think of, for which I also chose the finest threads of silk, wool and cotton I could find. I no longer had contact with the doctor who had initially raised the question of weaving smaller blankets, but instead I was now meeting parents who were experiencing the grief and loss of a baby, as well as midwives working at hospitals. And they all encouraged me to continue.

A weaving perspective

I am speaking, acting, researching and writing from a maker’s – from a weaver’s – perspective. I often think of my loom as the point of departure. In my studio, thoughts and threads are linked together in the form of small-scale samples, or full lengths of fabric. When thinking of the outcome of my weaving, that is, in the making of textiles related to the death process, I place the crafting process and myself in a world of references that are situated between weaving and thoughts of time, or sometimes even a lack of time, a time limit. To illustrate the thoughts that sometimes come to me whilst weaving, let me give you a few examples



Fig. 6. Infant-wrapping cloth, handwoven, 2011.

of metaphors related to weaving. The prophet Isaiah wrote about death in the following way:

Mine age is removed, and is carried away from me as a shepherd's tent: I have rolled up like a weaver my life; he will cut me off from the loom: from day even to night wilt thou make an end of me. (Isaih 38:12)

Another reference of weaving as a metaphor is when Penelope in the *Odyssey* stays with the weave she is making for her father-in-law's shroud in order to delay having to marry any of the suitors that want to take over the kingdom. She is waiting for the return of her husband and king, Ulysses, convinced that he will soon be back from his journey. The weaving process keeps her free, and so she weaves during the day, unravelling what she has woven during the night, until she gets caught (Homer 1961: 34).

There are many metaphors related to textiles that we use to express a sense of being linked, or a sense of being very fragile; a few examples of these are: life and people intertwining, being tied to each other, the web of life, life hanging on a single thread. Finiteness and the infinite are also embraced through the metaphor

of the weave and can be used to refer to the everyday and to the everlasting – all at the same time. I can, in my inner self, relate to all these textile references; it is, however, more problematic to use them as metaphors. My arguments could be further strengthened by referring to the deep relationships between the fabric and the human, and could be developed by looking into different cultures and habits over time. However, my reality, that is, my weaving and meeting people in their mourning process, is both my practical and theoretical framework. It is the weaving itself that is my expression, my *modus operandi* and it is the craft in my art work that leads the way.

Dressing the loom

When I first came across the expression *to dress a loom*, its beauty, its poetic, and at the same time constructive, dimensions really thrilled me. However, when I translated this phrase into my own language, Swedish, it turned out to be not quite correct, since I was only thinking of the loom draped with fabric. To use the word *dress* as preparation for crafting, making and fabrication expands my understanding, also in relation to death, when dressing and preparing the dead body and coffin.

In Swedish, *att klä (sig)* 'to dress (oneself)' is mainly used as an expression for putting your clothes on, or sometimes in relation to celebrations and rituals such as dressing the Christmas tree or the altar.

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Fig. 7. The beginning; the warp.



Fig. 8 (left). Pulling on the warp with weights. Fig. 9 (right). Heddling.

But we never dress the ordinary table. In English the expression ‘dress’ is connected to a variety of actions related to setting up, processing and preparation. It has constructive elements. So here it is appropriate to mention that the title for this paper: ‘Dressing the body’ is chosen using the word ‘dress’ in its widest sense and meaning.

During the dressing of the loom, the threads are being handled with precision, care and a great deal of patience (Fig. 8). It is only possible to make a few shortcuts, if any. Every action leads to the next step, and so too do any mistakes one makes. As a weaver, you handle these preparations with a number of strategies, finding your own way of checking and securing your activities during the course of the process. The first group of threads to be threaded through the heddles is the hardest part (Fig. 9). Beforehand, you have been warping, and, later on, have been pulling on the warp. Here, every little single thread has passed through your hands several times until you finally come to the tricky step of heddling. Twenty-four threads are being threaded through the eyes of the heddles and you know that there are at least 2,000 more threads to do. Sometimes, at this moment, I feel that I consciously change my breathing, I also lower my shoulders, trying to find a more acceptable working position, whilst, at the same time, adopting an approach where I no longer take in all the impressions coming to me from this vast amount of material.

Easy-listening detective stories are my only company. And sometimes as a comparison I think of my colleague, Swati Maskeri, in Bangalore. When, together with her weavers, she dresses the loom for weaving saris, 12,600 threads of the finest mulberry silk are being handled with the utmost care. In comparison with that, my effort is nothing – it is just something that needs to be done.

The next stage involves the weaver’s reed. Again, the threads are to be pulled through the reed, which divides the threads as well as putting them in order according to the pattern. However, its most important function is to fix the distance between each single thread, and by doing so, to establish the density of the weft. The spaces in between the threads are as important as the material and for me, air is one of the most active constituents in the composition of a weave. This ‘interspace’, this ‘in between’, plays a role in producing width and depth, and I can choose or create a binding that alters how the thread ‘floats’, as we say in the language of textiles. I work with variations of double weave, which allows me to be able to constantly play with, and construct, pockets of air. And texture, touch, tactility, the weave, the web of life, as well as interweaving thoughts and ideas accompany me in the process.

New thinking and tactile care in hospitals: is this possible?

Now let us come back to the creation of the infant-wrapping cloth. If hand weaving in and through the making of unique blankets was initially a perfect way to address the question, this alone wasn't enough for the next part of the process. In order to find out how these blankets could find their way into hospital care, I needed the blankets to be produced with as little cost as possible, and, at the same time, without losing quality. Together with an industrial weaving company, Ludvig Svensson AB, I then designed an industrially manufactured blanket cloth, and I now have hundreds of metres in my studio that I have started cutting into squares (Fig. 10). I do the edging with a sewing machine, using zigzag stitches over silk thread around the edges, leaving a little fringe around the whole blanket. After washing the weft, you no longer see the machine stitch, only the attached thread is visible (Fig. 11). By doing the sewing and cutting by hand, I compensate for the fact that the textile is industrially manufactured, reclaiming it and making

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Fig. 10. Cutting the fabric.

Nicke Andersson



Fig. 11. Sewing.

it into a crafted expression. The blankets are produced with small variations and most important of all, I can alter their size, depending on how many weeks the baby or foetus has been borne by its mother.

The quality of the industrially manufactured blanket is different from that of the first series of blankets. I realised that using the most exclusive silk and merino wool would be very counterproductive, in consideration of the future of this blanket; if it is to be a lasting contribution on the delivery wards, its production costs must be minimal. These unique blankets were not prototypes – they were the first body of work, and they helped me to frame the research question. The only way I could choose, as I have mentioned earlier, was to begin by creating beauty and softness – as soft as possible – and warmth.

Later I came to realise how important the blanket's capacity *to hold* was; the blanket needs to have some of the resilience the dead body has lost. Extra softness is added to the body by means a little sheet of cotton satin, used as an inner wrapping layer. Guided and taught by experienced midwives, I have also come to understand more about the rapid breaking down of the human body, which means that the blanket must be able to absorb liquids. Therefore, the material used in the warp for the new weave is lamb's wool, and for the weft the material used is unbleached, mercerised cotton combined with woollen yarn made of a mixture of wool and viscose.

The work involved here has also come to be of a sculptural kind, that is, it is not merely tactile; it is not only what your hand feels or your eyes see, it is also about holding, caring and nesting.



Fig. 12. Kortedala architecture.

At the very same time as this article is being written I am preparing for a clinical study, which is planned to be conducted in three Swedish delivery wards, and where the application is to be handed in for ethical vetting. The path has been a long one – from the first thread to be chosen until now, when it is time for the textile to be tested in practice, in action.

The wrapping cloths in the research project will be given as a gift to the parents concerned, and provided free of charge to hospitals. Feedback takes place as the staff fill in a questionnaire concerning the relevance of the infant-wrapping cloth and how it has been used. First and foremost, I wish to find out whether the blanket is necessary, and if so, in what ways. Secondly, I wish to know more about the textile itself by means of a number of questions to be posed on the subject of expression and tactility. Whether this little blanket may come to represent an innovative, low-scale, tactile language within hospital care in Sweden in the future, is a question yet to be answered, but my conviction still remains that it is through the textile material itself that the answer can be found.

A woven chronicle

Infant-wrapping cloths, as well as a funeral pall woven for a church, have been studied in a research project entitled: *In a Room of Rites: Cloth Meeting Human* (Nordström 2016). In the part of this project related to the funeral pall, I came closer to grasping

a sense of what ritual experience within a collaborative making process comprises. It all started with a question from a priest, who asked: 'Would you be interested in a recycling project, using old sacred garments that can be turned into a new funeral pall?' In the church (called Allhelgonakyrkan in Kortedala, a suburb of the city of Gothenburg) there were older altar textiles stored away, and the church staff had raised the idea of using these as possible components for a new funeral textile. The altarpieces that became our starting point were originally made in the studio of the artist Agda Österberg in 1960, and were woven in wool and viscose without embroidery; they had a very rustic feeling about them, and greatly resembled the raw, brick-built indoor walls of the church.

I started working together with a group in the parish concerned, and my intention here was to weave a pall as a textile means of portraying traces of the urban landscape. This suburb was built in the 1950s, and is quite a distance from the city centre. It was from the beginning designed as a symbol for modernity, and was presented as 'living in the space age', where new experimental architecture was also a keyword. However, Kortedala soon became a suburb with social problems, far removed from the visions it had been constructed on the basis of.

Here I spent a summer sketching and taking photographs of places that I had been recommended to visit by church members. They sent me letters with instructions and I went out 'collecting' for the weave

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Fig. 13. Unravelling and ordering.



I was to design and produce. We then started to rip off the linings of the old altar textiles so that we could wash everything. The next step was to unravel parts of the textiles in order to get material for the new weave (Fig. 13). My idea was to create an edging for the blanket that also formed the central section of the funeral pall, and which would also act as a chronicle, giving glimpses of Kortedala's architecture (Fig. 14). During this process we followed a textile practice that has been performed for thousands of years, where the thread is treated as a precious material. Today we can say that we can (almost) transform this practice into a rite; not so very long ago it was merely a matter of course, a necessity, but now, in and through the re-making that came into being in our times, this practice has acquired a new worth. In my way of seeing things here, what essentially came to be the rite, the ritual experience, was, in fact, all the hours of stitching the newly woven parts together. Metre after metre, hour-by-hour, and stitch-by-stitch we would sit, side-by-side; and some of us might have been thinking and wondering: will this be my funeral blanket?

What I also realised during the process was that the same hands that were unravelling the threads and sewing the new parts of the pall together will also be the hands that will look after and care for the textile in the future. This pall will not be just an ordinary item in the church storage room.

The title *Kortedalakrönika* ('The Chronicle of Kortedala') was originally related to my documentation of the landscape and architecture of Kortedala, through the transformation of windows and walls into woven ornaments. Today, I see the title 'The Chronicle of Kortedala' more in terms of a chronicle that is yet to be written, by way of its ritual use in the funerals that will take place at this church in the suburb of Gothenburg. I will also accompany this textile in this use.

Textile actions

The palls being used at Christian or non-confessional Swedish funerals have different meaning from the palls I weave for hospitals; an example of which I will describe later. During the funeral rite, the pall is draped over the coffin as a textile homage. It may sometimes be taken off during the ceremony before the coffin is carried out, and if that is the case, this action involving the textile becomes part of taking leave; the undressing of the coffin and the folding up of the pall representing an act of separation. In funeral services today, it is perhaps the dressing, the draping of the coffin, and in the end, the undressing of the coffin that is the closest we will come to the act of wrapping,

Fig. 14. Detail of digital woven chronicle for the funeral blanket.

since nowadays the preparation of the dead body is taken care of by professional undertakers. We normally don't take part.

Last year I received a commission from a hospital to weave a pall for a funeral parlour. This textile is somewhat different from that for the funeral pall since it acts as a temporal dressing, that is, a blanket to be used for the moment of saying farewell, covering the body itself, not the coffin. One challenge that gave me plenty of pause of thought in this process was to think of covering and uncovering the face, where an inner and outer part of the blanket would become a part of expressing this and would need to be created. So this year I will continue to weave and further investigate the meaning and significance of these textiles, since I also have a new commission for a hospital being built in Stockholm, where previously, I have been told, a normal sheet, belonging to the hospital linen stock, has always been used. That this hospital has asked me for a hand-woven blanket for them to use may signify a change in attitude on their part, and indicates that there is an increasing awareness of the ritual value of textiles in leave-taking, and that these textiles have to be handled with care; they can never be sent to the hospital's laundry as mere routine.

I know too little about this field to describe the use of unique blankets – palls – as art commissions for funeral parlours, but why is it that I have received these commissions at this very point in time? What is it that I am to learn here? Is it related to me acquiring a greater awareness of the importance of leave taking? Is it related to the fact that we have distanced ourselves from meeting death in a concrete way and that this is some kind of a backlash? When it comes to the death of newly-born children, it was not such a long time ago that these children were just taken away, without the opportunity being given to their parents to hold and see them. The opposite is taking place now, and my research is part of that movement.

Reflections

I will end by reflecting on a variety of thoughts that have emerged during the course of the process.

The material in itself sets the person who is working off into an exploratory mode – concerning the



Fig. 15 (top). Detail of process. Photograph by Birgitta Nordström. Fig. 16 (bottom). 'The Chronicle of Kortedala'. Photograph by Andreas Karlsson.

material's features. The activity leads the thought, so to speak; or actually the opposite may also occur, that is, the thought leads the doing – there is interaction and reciprocal interplay, back and forth, throughout the whole process. It is like having some kind of correspondence with the material – and in my case, as a weaver, the thread; with every single moment of the hand weaving I perform I am creating opportunities for change, testings, refinements; there is space for impulses to arise – as well as for risk-taking to occur. The process of preparing textiles for industrial production, however, is about ensuring quality prior to mass production. But when I then cut the infant-wrapping cloths out of the three hundred metres of woven fabric from the factory into squares, I cut so as to produce and create a very necessary warped effect. I want traces of their individuality and the principles of unfixedness, uncertainty, of no guarantees, to be visible in and through what is created here.

As I wander in and through my artistic work, the wandering takes on the shape of strolling, in a tentative way, sauntering backwards and forwards, sometimes without having a clear idea of what I am looking to express, while at other times being able to pinpoint precisely what I'm seeking. Here, intuition

is, for me, an idea, a thought, a transition into, or a crossing-over into action. In that way, it is of a forceful and driven character. I weave on, and in this work the weaving is literally in the material, and comes to be of a more immaterial kind in the conversation and in my meeting with people. Of death we can only speak, write, and ponder. I can also weave, and the weave can represent and express what cannot be expressed in a concrete, tangible way, and act as a kind of invocation.

Covering and wrapping are two very key actions involving textiles which are taken when a person passes away. We cover a body and a face. A piece of cloth over a body, draped in such a way, signifies that which comes after. And here we create a physical separation to make death feel real; and we do this with the help of a textile object.

Wrapping is an alternative form of embrace. When a human being is born into life, he or she is born into textile material; welcomed into the world, they are received, dried clean, and a small piece of cloth is wrapped around the body to keep the child warm. We leave the same life, perhaps a long time later, in the embrace of another sort of textile. Washed, dried and wrapped. Here, the gesture is

Carl Ander



Fig. 17. *I sin linda*. Swaddling blankets 2015.

not about separation, it is rather inclusive, and is a reminder of the life that has been as a human being, and is now at an end. Being able to wrap, and the process of wrapping, is an action we need to take for the sake of existence, for the sake of being able to exist.

The conceptual work behind my research project, and where I now focus on infant-wrapping cloths, has been made up of a gathering of ideas and the production of these very special cloths. This work has been characterised by my being able to take part in other people's experiences, which, in turn, also provide the fuel for the project. In this way, the wrapping cloths remain memory bearers for me; no matter what happens to them in the future, they will always live on within me.

The role they have played, thus far, is as a symbol of the meeting between cloth and human; the wrapping cloths are made up of a piece of cloth that can be folded into the shape of a basket and that can embrace, and that can provide warmth. Their task, to my mind, is to receive, to act as receivers, and as comforters. They also act as the touchable, the tactile, the tangible, as well as acting as, and being, the space 'in between.' ■



Birgitta Nordström is an artist and weaver. Since 2008 she has been an associate professor at the Academy of Design and Crafts (HDK) at the University of Gothenburg. In parallel with her lecturing she works on commissions for public and sacred spaces. Her current research focuses on textiles, rites and death – especially woven textiles for funerals and moments of loss.

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